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E.O. 12958: DECL: 11/17/2016  
TAGS: [PBTS](#) [PGOV](#) [PHUM](#) [MO](#)  
SUBJECT: WESTERN SAHARA: AUTONOMY IDEAS EMERGE DESPITE  
CORCAS SHAM

REF: RABAT 1775

Classified By: Classified by Ambassador Thomas T. Riley for reasons 1.4  
(b) and (d)

11. (C) Summary: The so-called "CORCAS" autonomy plan that its president announced he would submit to the King was not broadly approved by Sahrawis, even among CORCAS itself. In the event CORCAS had legitimately approved, it still would have meant little, as CORCAS itself is not a representative institution. The news is not all bad, however. Enough details of autonomy plan discussions have leaked to suggest that some potentially interesting ideas are in play; these may see the light of day in another CORCAS meeting scheduled December 21. We should not forget, however, that at this point we do not feel that this plan necessarily reflects any broad consensus of the Sahrawis. END SUMMARY.

12. (C) The Royal Consultative Council for Saharan Affairs, known as CORCAS, held a two-day "Extraordinary meeting" December 4-5. At the meeting's end, the Council's Chairman, long-time Sahrawi politician Kalihenna Ould Er Rachid, announced that "CORCAS" had approved an autonomy plan and he would submit it to King Mohammed VI. He said autonomy would guarantee the political, social, economic and cultural rights of the Sahrawi people under the sovereignty of the Moroccan monarchy. He maintained it would be in harmony with international law. A referendum would be impossible, he thundered, partly because the Sahrawi people lived also in Mauritania, Algeria, other parts of Morocco and elsewhere.

13. (C) Kalihenna's announcement was covered by press from Morocco and Spain. The only detail Kalihenna announced at the conference was that Spanish would be the second language of the independent territory, after Arabic and before French. Kalihenna allegedly told Spanish reporters afterwards that the CORCAS had unanimously approved the plan.

14. (C) Some CORCAS members, including CORCAS Human Rights Committee chairman Baida El Hocine (protect) have told us and the press they were very unhappy. Not only had the meeting not approved such a plan, but the rank and file had not even seen a draft, nor were they aware of details. Participants also told us the session had gotten off to a bad start. Mobile phones were confiscated by security personnel, sometimes forcibly, citing direct orders from His Majesty the King.

15. (C) El Hocine and other CORCAS members disillusioned with

the leadership have told the press they would be submitting their own plan and comments to the King. They railed at Kalihenna, decrying his dictatorial stage management of the meeting and of the CORCAS in general. At the same time they stressed their own support for Moroccan sovereignty. Our interlocutors acknowledged that some of the issues within the CORCAS were tribal. The CORCAS dissidents told us that 80 percent of their fellow members were on Kalihenna's payroll, but even those did not get to see a "plan". These Sahrawis had agreed to become CORCAS members in the first place because they support Moroccan sovereignty, and alienating them further jeopardizes the limited credibility of the CORCAS and the GOM in the Sahara. Nevertheless, they are not planning to quit and expect to attend the "ordinary" or regularly scheduled meeting due to begin on December 21.

¶16. (C) Some Sahrawi in Layoune who are not supportive of Morocco told us they were not bothered by the deception at CORCAS. CORCAS had no credibility for them anyway. It was, as billed, only a consultative council, with selected, not elected membership. They remain fixed on self determination by a referendum. Separately, the CORCAS dissidents told us they believed King Hassan's old CORCAS was fairly chosen and relatively representative, with members chosen by elections held within the tribes.

¶17. (C) Despite the disputes, some substance subsequently emerged on what the so-called CORCAS proposal, or perhaps more accurately, on what GOM thinking, may contain. The CORCAS extraordinary session did discuss the natural resource question, having spent most of the first day on it. There was agreement that some division of income from resources was needed, though it was unclear whether the GOM should have part ownership or simply the authority to tax revenues. In

discussions with members and others and from press leaks we have heard the following additional details of a potential plan:

--The King would be sovereign;

--A bicameral legislature, with a popularly elected lower house and an upper house of the tribal shaykhs. The Parliament itself would have political parties and some sources intimated possible future participation of the Polisario could not be ruled out;

--Justice would be delivered in the King's name and using the Moroccan system, but the justices would be Sahrawi;

--Security (i.e. police) would be Sahrawanized;

--International borders would remain a Moroccan responsibility, and protected by the Moroccan Army, which would remain stationed on the territory; and

--The borders of Saharan autonomy would be the borders of formerly Spanish Sahara: the special regime would not apply to traditionally Sahrawi areas of Morocco proper, south of Agadir.

¶18. (C) Because of the unattributed sourcing, we cannot confirm these elements would be included in any eventual plan. Some press has suggested that the plan was elaborated not in CORCAS, but in the palace, a view shared by the CORCAS dissidents.

¶19. (C) We also understand the King was to hold meetings with Walis and other officials this week in Agadir to discuss decentralization, a prerequisite domestically to a viable autonomy plan.

¶10. (C) COMMENT: For our part, we believe the USG should make clear to the Moroccan officials that when they are ready, they should present their ideas transparently to the Sahrawis, and directly, if quietly, to the Polisario. But they should not pretend to the USG or the rest of the international community that they have the imprimatur of a

constituency that has not been consulted. This will hardly win them votes at the UN. In addition, they should focus more on hearts and minds on the ground (see septel on the recent suppression of a non-violent demonstration). We would welcome instructions to share these views with the GOM. END COMMENT.

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<http://www.state.sgov.gov/p/nea/rabat>  
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Riley